

EXHIBIT 3
DATE 2-10-09
HB 51

House Bill 51
February 10, 2009
Presented by Chas Van Genderen
House Fish Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, for the record I am Chas Van Genderen, Acting parks division administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP).

FWP stands in opposition to House Bill 51 which would make the vehicle registration fee opt-in. That is no surprise. What may be a surprise, however, is the positive impact the opt-out system has had on State Parks and Fishing Access Sites, how well supported the current system of funding is, how quickly we forget recent history and what is at risk if this bill is passed.

Opt-in programs do not generate revenue at any meaningful level. During our review of four different opt-in programs, no participation rate exceeds 1%. The fiscal note for this bill assumes 6% participation; yet revenue losses to the parks program would be more than \$1.7 million in 2010 and more than \$2.5 million in 2011 and beyond. That revenue loss would force the closure of parks and reduce programs for school children and special events like Bannack Days.

To give a short history lesson, the issue of funding parks through opt in, opt-out, or mandatory registration fees was debated in the 2003 Legislature. In 2002, various legislators had just completed the second state park analysis in 12 years. That committee found the same thing the previous group had--State Parks are under funded and understaffed by a clear measure. Former Senate President Bob Keenan requested SB 336 to remove entrance fees for residents and place the fee on vehicles as part of their registration. Mandatory registration fees looked like a tax, Opt-in would not generate enough funds to do any good, and Opt-out passed. The legislation took away all general fund from the park operating budget and removed day use fees for residents. That is where we are today. People are happy and complaints are few.

The program is widely supported. About 88% of vehicles have the fee paid. The division has worked hard to inform Montanans of the \$4.00 with displays and flyers in county treasurers offices. This is the first program of its kind in the nation, and the investment has been good.

The funds have significantly improved services and facilities. Visitors to parks are very happy. Visitation has gone from 1.3 million in 2003 to 1.9 million in 2007. Additionally, resident use has increased from about 72% in 2003 to 84% today. Funding approved by the legislature has gone to basic maintenance and staff to do that maintenance, but has also gone to renovation and improvements. Based on survey results, most visitors feel the quality of their experience has improved because of better staff service and better-maintained facilities.

In closing, HB 51 revisits a public policy issue that was reasonably addressed in 2003. Should the legislature do an "about face" just six years later? "Opt-in" would result in a significant loss to Montanans and their guests by drastically reducing the revenues that fund State Park and FAS maintenance. This bill would force the closure of state parks and impact FASs at a time when the Park Division is serving citizens very well. It is no surprise that FWP opposes HB 51.

Exp Acct	Category	2004		2005		2006		2007		2008	
		Parks 02411	FAS 02558	Parks 02411	FAS 02558	Parks 02411	FAS 02558	Parks 02411	FAS 02558	Parks 02411	FAS 02558
62100	Other Svcs	62,085	801	266,435	2,662	331,413	6,119	228,499	8,807	352,345	8,169
62200	Supplies & Mtrls	82,793	5,801	246,835	5,426	342,127	15,011	167,581	8,718	199,181	8,735
62300	Comms	15,611	281	40,828	626	67,350	1,661	53,369	1,784	57,258	2,034
62400	Travel	43,870	11,466	93,646	13,563	127,273	22,797	117,839	20,842	148,099	19,814
62500	Rent	6,572	24	16,137	125	23,670	1,049	20,798	612	27,752	728
62600	Utilities	25,742	2,393	48,917	2,144	60,683	3,365	60,563	2,764	75,817	2,154
62700	Repair & Maint.	116,248	4,400	413,721	5,911	378,059	8,445	253,451	9,699	387,676	6,300
62800	Other Exps	9,546	216	37,437	396	48,405	957	39,048	772	49,603	867
62900	Goods for Resale	1,382		8,092		1,133	18	84	5	38	
63100	Equipment	28,912		42,551		45,362		27,234		34,489	
64100	Land *see "Notes"	8,630		37,461				351,118		473,749	
64200	Buildings	38,480						32,213		502,223	
64300	Other Improvements	113,302		22,487		52,677		523,603		420,814	
	Grand Total	\$553,173	\$25,383	\$1,274,547	\$30,852	\$1,478,152	\$59,422	\$1,875,399	\$54,004	\$2,729,043	\$48,805

*Notes-

Details for expenditures of Land & Interest in Land

2004

*L&C Caverns (Bushilla Acquisition) - 8.66 acres adjacent to park's west edge; landowner family initiated acquisition; **\$8,630.**

2005

*First People's Buffalo Jump (DNRC lease) - 418 acres; Native American site; **\$10,823.**

*Brush Lake (initial acquisition) - 200 acres; first park in Region 6 (NE Montana); state funds were matched with \$78,000 federal Wallop-Breaux funds for purchase; **\$26,638.**

2006

*Alberton Gorge (Stranahan property) - 145 acres on the Clark Fork R.; **\$221,118.**

*Glendive Rifle Range (DNRC lease) - 357 acres for new public range; **\$130,000.**

2007

*Lone Pine - 41 acres adjacent to park; landowner family initiated; **\$470,338.**

*Cooney - potential purchase of adjacent parcel; landowner initiated inquiry/sale opportunity; appraisal costs split; **\$3,411.**

Summary of Visitor Comment Cards and Survey Comments

2004—2008

Re: Vehicle Registration Fees

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LAKE ELMO--BILLINGS

- Great way this year. Will use the lake much more with the plate pay.
- It's great that you don't have to pay when you get here. I like how they take it out on your plates.

PICTOGRAPH CAVES--BILLINGS

- Very well done. Neat, clean and informative. Made the \$4 on my truck license very affordable. Keep up the good work.

GIANT SPRINGS—GREAT FALLS

- The upkeep of the park is very nice. It's nice not having to pay entrance for every visit. It's worth paying with plates. We will come back more often.
- We really appreciate the dropping the fees since it gives us a place to take our handicapped son. Accessibility great.
- Eliminating the annoying entrance fee for residents was a great idea. Another great idea would be to eliminate the geese.
- I always enjoy my visit to Giant Springs. I like the park fee being included in the fees for plates. I will be able to visit the park more often now.
- It's about time. I have purchased every stupid license (sportsman's special permits, waterfowl, state parks, etc.) I finally get something for paying the price of living in Montana.
- Admission added to vehicle license has been an excellent idea.
- Thank you for taking away the entry gate & fee. This park is a pleasure and should be enjoyed by everyone.
- Employees were very friendly and helpful. We are satisfied with the new fee arrangement. On the negative side the concrete walkways are covered with geese droppings
- Neat idea waiving entry fee for MT residents and transferring fee to vehicle licensing fee.

SPRING MEADOW LAKE—HELENA

- Very pleased with the \$4 access fee charge instead of 430 park pass for Montana residence. I also think you should open up the dirt road again.
- It's great not to have to pay onsite, but rather have park visits be part of our vehicle fees.

WEST SHORE—LAKESIDE

- Great improvements. It's good to have the fee incorporated into our vehicle license.

COONEY—RED LODGE

- The free daily fee use is a great asset.

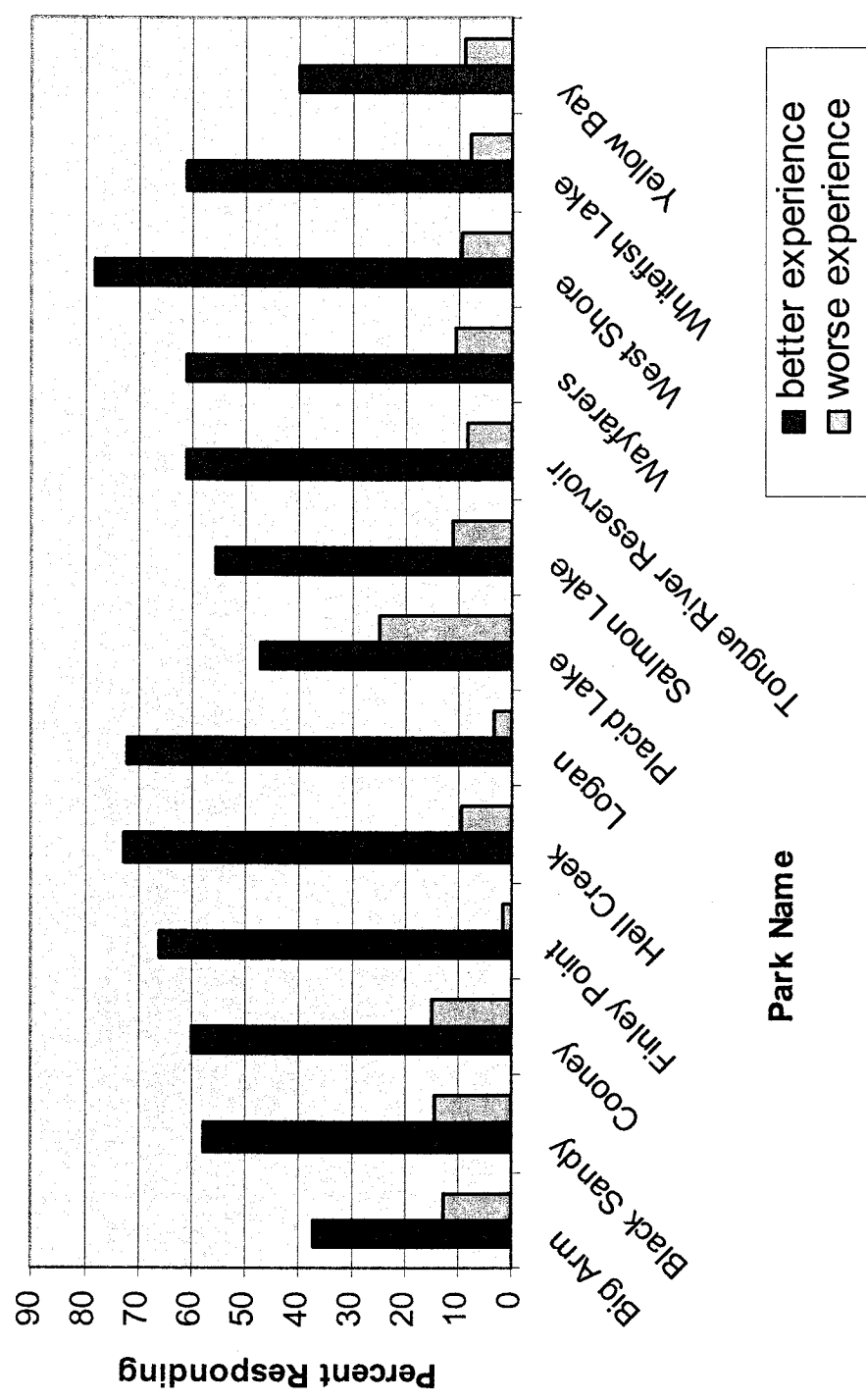
SALMON LAKE—SEELEY LAKE

- I really like the fact that Montana residents can visit these parks without an additional fee—part of the license plates. Thanks.
- I very much like having the park fees added to vehicle licensing.

WHITEFISH LAKE—WHITEFISH

- Improvement to ramp is great. Dock is getting weathered and needs some attention. Really like that the day use fee comes from vehicle registration for residents.

Quality of Your Experience over the last Five Years at Montana State Parks



(Water-Based Parks Study 2006-07)